

Air Force Core Values: Don't leave home without them

By Lt. Col. Jeffrey Hilt
8th Operations Support Squadron commander

You might remember the commercials for a financial services company that used to run on television. A young couple travelling to some exotic destination gets rolled and loses almost everything. The only thing left for the couple to do is to call a mysterious phone number. The aforementioned company immediately sends a suitcase full of money with which they purchase dinner, new clothes, a 5-series BMW, and drive off happily into the sunset. We are warned with the catchy phrase "Don't leave home without it." You could say that our Air Force core values are much like that financial safety net. Carry them with you at all times and they can be drawn upon to keep you out of a tight spot or to help you do the right thing.

The United States Air Force has three core values: integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do. These are simple words, but they define what we believe about ourselves and what we expect from others. You may be asking yourself, "why have core values and what do they mean to me?" This can best be explained by two Air Force leaders who were at the forefront of the development of this set of values.

Former Secretary of the Air Force Sheila Widnall emphasized that, "These core values represent the fundamental principles by which airmen, Air Force civilians and Air Force contractors must carry out their work and live their daily lives. They make the Air Force what it is. They are the values that instill confidence, earn lasting respect and create willing followers. They are the pillars of professionalism that provide the foundation for military leadership at every level."

Former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Ronald Fogleman added, "These core values and the sense of community and professionalism they bring to our service are vitally important to the future of our Air Force."

The first core value is integrity. But what is integrity, and why integrity first?

According to the basic guide on core values, *U.S. Air Force Core Values*, Jan. 1, 1997, integrity is a character trait that gives one the willingness to do what is right, even when no one is looking. It is our inner voice, moral compass and the basis for the trust imperative in today's military. The guide further says that integrity covers other moral traits. These include having the courage of one's convictions, creating an open environment within one's unit, treating people in a just manner, and taking responsibility for and standing accountable for one's actions.

In this regard, Fogleman put it succinctly when he said, "We're entrusted with the security of our nation. The tools of our trade are lethal, and we engage in operations that involve risk to human lives and national treasure. That's why integrity is so important to the profession we're in, and why the standards we are judged by must be higher than the society we serve." Why do we say "integrity first?"

Again, Fogleman summed it up best when he explained, "Integrity is the bedrock of our core values. At the heart of our military profession has to be the idea that a person's word is his bond. If you're going

to be in this business, if you're going to talk about the profession; you must have integrity." He added that, "In the Air Force, we don't pencil-whip training reports, we don't cover up technical data violations, we don't falsify documents, and we don't submit misleading readiness indicators. The bottom line is we don't lie." Integrity is the trait that we can draw upon to help us do the right thing for the right reason.

The very fact that you are reading this means that you are keenly aware of the next core value, service above self. The Wolf asks every one of us during the in-brief on our first day at Kunsan "how many of you volunteered?" Usually, not many hands are raised. The basic guide on core values tells us that professional duties must take precedence over personal desires.

On service above self, Fogleman said, "We are not engaged in just another job. We are entrusted with the security of our nation, the protection of its citizens and the preservation of our democratic way of life. By its very nature, our military profession requires us to place the needs of our service and the country before personal interests."

We deploy to the far corners of the earth on a moment's notice and are called on to willingly risk our lives to defend America's security interests. In the case of this assignment to Kunsan, we're also called on to protect one of our allies and their way of life. In the service to our country we are called on to do extraordinary things. Someone once said, "There are no heroes, only ordinary men and women caught in extraordinary circumstances."

Widnall pointed out that our nation's Medal of Honor winners are perfect examples of what normal people can do when they place service before self. Service before self builds teamwork, inspires others and more. It enables selfless acts of courage. Teamwork is an important aspect of service. We have come to Kunsan from a variety of locations with a myriad of expectations, but we're all in this little part of the Republic of Korea together. The goal is for this team to perform to the best of its abilities. We may be ordinary men and women, but together we can do extraordinary things.

The final core value is excellence in all we do. Referring to excellence, the basic guide on core values says it "Directs us to develop a sustained passion for continuous improvement and innovation that will propel the Air Force into a long-term, upward spiral of accomplishment and performance."

Frankly, I find that definition pretty difficult to get

my arms around. Every time you watch an F-16 do a combat departure here you see an upward spiral of accomplishment and performance. Of course, that is not what the guide is referring to. Excellence simply means striving to do our best in everything we're responsible for, both personally and professionally.

According to Secretary Widnall, "Excellence is a difficult concept. It can easily be misread as perfectionism, concern about details. On the contrary, excellence is the stuff that makes greatness. It is the difference between just getting by and soaring. Excellence sets apart the significant from the superficial, the lasting from the temporary. Those who pursue it do so because of what is in them, not because of what others think or say or do."

Let me challenge you by asking "what is in you?" Even though you may not be thrilled with your remote assignment to Kunsan, are you striving for excellence? Are you doing your best every day? This kind of assignment can be filled with challenges. Face every challenge by giving it your best. If you've given your best, you can be proud of yourself and happy with the result.

You might be asking yourself "why should I give my best?" One way to focus on excellence is to understand how your job is connected to the mission. Every one of us has a valuable part to play in the mission of the 8th Fighter Wing. Our mission is to defend the base, accept follow-on forces, and take the fight north. Every one of us, no matter what our job is, has an impact on the mission. Everyone has a part to play. Know that you contribute to the mission, know how you contribute to the mission, and strive for excellence each day. You are an important part of the Wolf Pack and when you do your best, this team does its best at our mission. Take the old adage to heart while you are here, don't just count the days—make the days count.

Commander's Hotline

The commander's hotline is your direct line of communication between me and the Wolf Pack. It's one of several means of helping to resolve concerns and to get my response to comments and questions. As a general rule, I ask you to contact the agency involved first, but if you are not satisfied, call the hotline at 782-5284, e-mail the 8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs office or e-mail me directly.



Col. Burt Field
8th Fighter Wing commander

Who to call	
Base exchange.....	782-4520
Chapel.....	782-4300
Civil engineer squadron customer service.....	782-5318
Commissary manager.....	782-4144
Computer help desk.....	782-2666
Fitness center.....	782-4026
Housing office.....	782-4088
Inspector General.....	782-4850
IDEA office.....	782-4020
Law enforcement desk.....	782-4944
Legal assistance.....	782-4283
Military equal opportunity.....	782-4055
Military pay.....	782-5574
Military personnel flight customer service.....	782-5276
Medical patient advocate.....	782-4014



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